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SUBJECT: HAILU SHAWAL: NO NEED FOR COALITIONS FOR NOW

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1154

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Ethiopian opposition parties should "get their own houses in order" and not form coalitions at this time, disgruntled former Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) stalwart Hailu Shawal told the Ambassador. Hailu disparaged the efforts of other opposition parties and contended that his All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP) was best positioned to challenge the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in the 2010 national elections, based on extensive and "quiet" grass roots outreach. Hailu said that reforms to the electoral process will be needed in advance of 2010 or "there will be no elections and no peace." EPRDF authoritarian tactics are creating rifts in the Ethiopian polity that could lead to disaster, Hailu charged, adding that the growth of Islamic extremism within Ethiopia poses the greatest threat to Ethiopia's stability. The Ambassador encouraged Hailu to reach out to the ruling party and other opposition groups to help create conditions favorable to peaceful, free and fair elections, and urged that the AEUP create an actual platform and proposed governance program as the party prepares for its national campaign. End Summary.

AEUP Will Be The Vehicle For 2010

2. (C) On September 9, the Ambassador met with AEUP Chairman and former CUD stalwart Hailu Shawal, who returned to Ethiopia in June after a year's absence. Hailu said that AEUP remains a registered political party in the wake of the post-2005 demise of the original CUD and that AEUP will be the vehicle by which he and his constituents contest the 2010 national elections. AEUP successfully held its party conference in Addis Ababa in June and 800 representatives from the countryside attended, according to Hailu. "It was encouraging," he added, "that despite jail (for AEUP leaders and supporters), and losing friends and property, they are still ready to (campaign)."

Hailu Rejects Coalitions

3. (C) Hailu made it clear that AEUP will seek to build a national base and will reject coalitions with other opposition parties for the foreseeable future. He assailed Birtukan Demeksa's new Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)

party as "just a group of friends, with no constituents," and said the only UDJ member with whom he speaks regularly is Yacob Hailemariam. He added that he had no need to speak with Birtukan because "I (previously) suspended her from my organization (i.e., CUD)." "For the time being," Hailu said, "every opposition party should get its own house in order, then perhaps we can work together. Coalitions have problems if the members have not focused on (the needs of their own constituencies). (In 2005) I made mistakes and my constituents were angry with me because I forced the coalition. I won't do that again." Asked if AEUP would seek to work with the largely Oromo coalition known as the "Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia," Hailu said "I'm not ready to reach out to the Oromos yet, because the government will harass us."

Without Pre-Election Reforms, 2010 Will Be "Like Zimbabwe"

¶4. (C) Hailu said AEUP did not contest the April, 2008 local elections because at the time he was not in Ethiopia to organize a campaign and because "we knew it would be a joke."

In the initial run-up to the 2010 national elections, AEUP's strategy will be to be "quiet." "It is no longer the time for big shouting matches," Hailu said, noting that AEUP will concentrate for some time on organizing and registering members zone by zone throughout Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on previously neglected communities in Afar and Oromiya. Hailu said there is not enough political space in Ethiopia for opposition parties, but added, "we have to make the space." He expressed confidence that, with persistence,

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the AEUP would be able to open local offices throughout the countryside despite EPRDF harassment. "I don't need access to television and media," Hailu noted, "that's not my strategy - but a (nonpartisan) election board and independent observers are critical. Without those elements, the 2010 elections will be another Zimbabwe."

Hailu Resurrects CUD's Eight Point Plan

¶5. (C) Hailu said that if the CUD's "eight point" plan from 2005 is not implemented fully, "there will be no (2010) election and no peace." Ethiopian elder Ephraim Isaac promised Hailu that the Elders process would create necessary dialogue between AEUP and the EPRDF, but Hailu remarked "I don't think (Ephraim) can deliver, but we'll go through with the process." Hailu said he has no plans to engage directly the EPRDF absent the Elders' mediation. (NOTE: The "eight point" plan sets forth conditions under which the CUD would join the Parliament: a restructured and independent National Electoral Board; free and accessible media for all political parties; a legal system independent of EPRDF influence; an independent commission to investigate "the June 8, 2005 killing of innocent Ethiopians"; politically neutral police and armed forces; the rescinding of Addis Ababa City governance regulations promulgated by the EPRDF-dominated Parliament; the release of all political prisoners and opening of opposition party offices; and the establishment of an independent commission to resolve the foregoing. END NOTE.)

EPRDF Authoritarianism

¶6. (C) Hailu charged that the EPRDF is politicizing formerly neutral, nonpartisan institutions, such as the university system, by, for example, forcing students to pledge allegiance to the EPRDF to receive slots or funding for their education. "It is cronyism over competence," Hailu said, adding, "I told our backers to go ahead and sign the pledge. No one can stop your minds and we (AEUP) know that you have to sign on to EPRDF only because you have no other choice. We know you still support (AEUP)." He also charged that the

EPRDF is "wiping out" political opposition by creating "artificial leaders" down to the kebele level. AEUP does not seek to draw attention to these alleged tactics because reporters and others in the media are "scared, and pressured by the police."

"Ethiopia has Artificial Stability"

17. (C) "Legitimacy cannot be gained by the gun," Hailu said, expressing concern that the "cruelty" of pro-EPRDF local authorities is sowing the seeds for "retribution." "The Ethiopian people are suffering, things are going down, getting out of hand. 'Revolutionary Democracy' (the EPRDF's ideology (reftel)) is the same Leftist rubbish from the Dergue times. There's no transition to democracy. There's no bridge to capitalism. We have artificial stability in Ethiopia and what concerns us is what's festering underneath. When it explodes, it will be very dangerous. This country won't exist when it explodes." Hailu contended that "(AEUP) messaging can prevent chaos," but emphasized that EPRDF authoritarianism is "strengthening the enemy."

Hailu Plays The Islamic Threat Card

18. (C) Asked to define the greatest threat to Ethiopian stability, Hailu said the rise of extremist Islam is a clear and present danger. "The money is now in Muslim hands," he said, adding that "(the ruling) Tigrayans are fighting for their cut but they get very little. EPRDF companies are mismanaged and inanimate. Even backed by the Central Bank they have no capacity for management and are not growing." Hailu said Ethiopia's (traditionally moderate) Muslim communities are falling under the sway of "those who want to put Ethiopia under (extremist) control." He added, "Many are not aware of the (strength of) the Islamic movement and are not doing anything about it." Throughout the countryside, young Christian women are converting to Islam, Hailu alleged. The EPRDF takes no actions against Islamic extremists

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because, Hailu explained, "as a Marxist government they see religion as secondary, and they perceive the threat as long-term, not immediate. Also, they control the Orthodox Church and the Muslim Council, and therefore think they control the people. But clerics and priests in the countryside think very differently." Hailu added that "the (Ethiopian Orthodox) Patriarch is the most hated in living memory because of his ties to the EPRDF" and because the Patriarch is replacing Church leadership with Tigrayans. Hailu said Ethiopian Christians must work to appeal to moderate Muslims, but he worried aloud that, "when crunch time comes, the Muslims will band together." He described the imperative in "Clash of Civilization" terms, arguing that "Ethiopia is where Christianity and democracy have to stand firm; if not, forget about security along the equator. (Extremists) can travel freely anywhere in the Muslim world, which will stretch from West Africa to Indonesia. The tendency of Islam is dictatorial. (Christian countries) face a big contagion."

Bio Note: Hailu Shawal

19. (C) Now roughly 78 years old, Hailu walked with a cane due to recent back surgery that has not healed as well as he expected, and is still causing him discomfort. Hailu said that, while in the United States, he had been diagnosed with diabetes, but he is effectively managing the disease. He noted that he could not easily get the necessary medications (presumably insulin) in Ethiopia, but friends inbound from abroad bring him the prescriptions he needs.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Ambassador took every opportunity to impress upon Hailu the need to engage with other political parties and the EPRDF in order to steer the country toward greater political space in advance of 2010. He also underscored that the United States will continue to work to promote democratic gains and help build credible national institutions in Ethiopia, in the interests of long term stability. However, it is clear from the tone and tenor of Hailu's discursive remarks that Hailu is unwilling at this point to pursue meaningful dialogue with other stakeholders. Showing no signs of having moderated since he pledged to "bring down this government" on September 20, 2005, after losing the elections, Hailu remains politically hostile and wedded to a cult of personality politics in which he is unable to distinguish himself from his party. Despite minimal local evidence of continued public support for either Hailu or AEUP, in future meetings Post will encourage Hailu and the AEUP to discuss (and develop) an actual platform and proposed governance strategy. On the positive side, we are encouraged that Hailu believes AEUP will be able to open political offices and otherwise pursue its election strategy even in the face of EPRDF harassment. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO